

HITCHIN RURAL DISTRICT.

Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the Year 1923.

To the Chairman and Members of the Council.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

The following is a summary of the condition of health of the District during the year:—

GENERAL STATISTICS.

Area (acres), 55,099.
Population (estimated), 13,260.
Number of inhabited houses (1921), 3,123.
Number of families or separate occupiers (1921), 3,166.
Rateable value, £99,753 3s. 0d.
Sum represented by a penny rate, £305 16s. 10d.

VITAL STATISTICS.

There were 265 births and 143 deaths; 12 infants died in the first year of life. There were 8 illegitimate births, six boys and two girls, and none of these infants died. Six infants died from probably pre-natal causes.

From these figures the following rates are derived:—

| | Hitchin R.D. | England and Wales. |
|---|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Birth-rate— per 1,000 living ... | 19.9 | 19.7 |
| Death-rate— per 1,000 living ... | 10.7 | 11.6 |
| Infant Mortality— per 1,000 born ... | 45.2 | 69. |

These figures are a slight improvement on last year, and show that our District is a healthy one.

The following are the causes of death: One death from measles, three from influenza; 15 deaths from lung tuberculosis and 1 from other tuberculous disease; 14 from cancer; 34 from cardiovascular disease; 20 from pulmonary disease; one from infantile diarrhoea; 4 from violence, and 44 from other causes.

EPIDEMIC DISEASE.

The following were the principal diseases notified:—

| | |
|---------------------|----|
| Scarlet fever ... | 11 |
| Diphtheria ... | 1 |
| Puerperal fever ... | 1 |
| Erysipelas ... | 2 |

The Attack rates of these diseases as compared with the average rates for the Country were:—

| | Hitchin R.D. | England and Wales. |
|---------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Scarlet fever ... | .82 | 2.23 |
| Diphtheria ... | .075 | 1.04 |
| Puerperal fever ... | .075 | .06 |
| Erysipelas ... | .15 | .32 |

Measles and Chicken pox are also notifiable in this district. This has been useful in limiting the spread of these diseases and enabling them to be kept under supervision. There have been several severe cases of chicken-pox, but they were all genuine cases of the disease.

The Joint Hospital has been very useful during the year, and the Small-pox Hospital at Langley has been kept ready for use in case of necessity.

SCHOOL INSPECTION.

During the year 576 children were examined and the following defects were found:—

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Unclean ... | 58 |
| Malnutrition ... | 22 |
| Defective Teeth ... | 79 |
| Enlarged Tonsils and Adenoids ... | 158 |
| Heart and Anæmia ... | 23 |
| Tuberculosis ... | 5 |
| Defective Eyesight ... | 32 |

Besides isolated other defects. Nearly half the children were unvaccinated. Small-pox is increasing in this

country and it is a great pity that parents neglect this simple and safe precaution. It is a surprise to find that children in the villages are often not so well nourished as those in the towns. "Drink more milk" is a simple remedy, and it surely is absurd that often milk cannot be obtained in the villages.

SANITARY WORK.

There has been steady progress in the Sanitary work, and this, with the supervision of over 400 cottages, has kept our Sanitary Inspector and his staff so busy that a systematic inspection has not been carried out this year. There is no doubt that there is much improvement in conditions this year, so much so that complaints of nuisances have been nil and only in a few cases has it been found necessary to serve a Statutory notice.

Generally speaking, landlords and tenants realize the advantage of sound and healthy dwellings though more cottages for the labourers at a rent they can afford to pay are still needed.

The rest of this report has been compiled with the kind assistance of Mr. Hooper.

There has been a regular inspection of slaughter houses, bakehouses, cowsheds, dairies, milk-shops, work-shops and work-places. One case of diseased meat was found. All milking cows were inspected and no case of tuberculosis visible to the naked eye was found.

There used to be a number of outworkers living at Lilley for Luton firms, but none have been registered this year.

OFFENSIVE TRADE.—There is a knackery at Ickleford, but it is on the Common, some distance from dwelling houses, and it is a well-kept business.

MILK SUPPLY.—Inspections reveal a general improvement in the conditions under which milk is produced, though no grading of milk has been carried out. Careful attention to the udders of the cows and cleanliness of the milkers, with immediate cooling of the milk, would greatly improve the supply and prevent souring of the milk.

WATER SUPPLIES.—A good, wholesome supply of water is now available at Codicote and a long-felt want has been supplied. Rabley Heath district has now also a good supply from Fulling Mill works.

The water-main has been extended from Weston to Hall's Green and that hamlet has now a good supply.

The weakest spot now is the Heath, Breachwood Green. Rain-water is practically the only supply to the whole of this village, and as the Council now has a good supply on its site for cottages, it should not now be difficult to solve this long-standing problem.

Water has now been laid on to Cockernhoe and Mangrove from the water tower on the Council's site at Cockernhoe, and much improvement has resulted in these villages.

The water supply to the village of Whitwell is not a good one. Many go to the river for drinking water, and the wells in the village are shallow and suspicious. On the Horn Hill Cottage site the Council have a deep bore hole with an engine. This could be piped to supply the near end of the village with good water.

SEWERS.—The extension of the sewer at Codicote from New Street to the North end of the village as far as the

Cottage site enables that end of the village to be connected up to the new sewer, and is a great improvement. There is still a part of the village extending from the High Street along the St. Alban's highway insufficiently sewered for about 250 yards. The existing sewer at that part is very shallow with uneven gradient, and has been a source of trouble for years. Inspection reveals it to be an old brick drain, very defective and broken in parts. This old sewer should be taken up, the polluted soil removed, and a sound sewer laid down.

HOUSING.—The cottages at Codicote are now occupied, and so the original scheme is now completed. There are, in spite of this, many applicants for cottages, for the need of the labourers is not yet met. Under the 1923 Act the Council are building six cottages of a smaller type, as an experiment, at Codicote. Each cottage will have three bedrooms. There are many applicants for these cottages already and as soon as a decent healthy home can be built for the labourer, there is no doubt that the Council should embark on schemes for many of the parishes.

Even now we know that cottages are badly wanted at Codicote, Old Knebworth, Ickleford, Little Wymondley and Whitwell.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| The number of housing inspections ... | 503 |
| Closing orders made ... | 9 |
| Closing orders determined ... | 9 |
| Demolition orders made ... | 18 |

30 Demolition orders altogether have been made, 22 of these have been carried out, and 3 have been quashed on appeal, as they have been made into habitable cottages. Wherever owners are prepared to meet the Council's requirements as to repairs, the Council is only too willing to withdraw notices.

REPAIRS.—The Surveyor's department now carries out the work of repairs to the Council's cottages, and in this way a good standard of materials and workmanship is maintained.

There is one matter about the cottages which needs your attention with a view to immediate action. The entrance to the E.C.'s is by a door in a porchway near the scullery, and this is apt to create a nuisance. It should remedy this if this apartment were used for other purposes and an E.C. built against one of the barn walls.

On some of the Council's Cottage sites the drains from many cottages run to one cesspool. This soon becomes full and needs frequent emptying; this, of course, causes offensive smells. This is particularly so at Offley, Paulswalden, and Breachwood Green, where the cesspool in each case is near the highway. The Council should try to remedy this somehow, perhaps by a drain to take the sewage some distance away.

The Council has done valuable work during the year and our District is benefitting by it all, but the need for housing the labourer has not yet been satisfied and will not be met by private enterprise. One hopes that any housing scheme put forward will be taken full advantage of by the Council in the same excellent way it has done in the past.

I remain,

Your obedient servant,
NORMAN MACFADYEN,
M.B., D.P.H., M.O.H.

